

Dungeons, Dragons, and Desire by pterawaters

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Summary:

Nancy never figured knowing how to play her brother's silly D&D game would come in handy at college, but when her social life suddenly revolves around her friends' campaign, she's glad she knows what she's doing. Jonathan wasn't very good at making friends, but being coaxed into a game of D&D by his new college roommate pulls him out of his shell. When Steve recruited Nancy and Jonathan to Robin's new campaign, he never figured he'd start working through his real-life feelings in the game. As battles are fought and lives are lost, three adventurers grow closer together, in and out of the game.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

This takes place in the late 80s, but the D&D game the characters play uses 5th edition rules, because those are the ones I know! Written for “Meet Cute” on my Trope Bingo card, and also “Roommate AU” for the Stoncy Server Challenge.

Big thanks to [wolfish_willow](#) for beta reading!

Trigger warnings: Minor character death (none of the characters in the tags), descriptions of fantasy violence, period-typical internalized homophobia

This story is complete! I'll be posting chapters about every other day!

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Nancy watched her roommate, Carol, get ready for the party she'd been invited to. Nancy thought it would have been polite for Carol to invite her along too, but Carol had just said, “I don't think it's your kind of party,” and left it at that. With one final spray of her red hair, Carol told Nancy, “Don't wait up!” and left their dorm room.

It was only the second week of school, but Nancy thought she'd have at least *one* friend by now. Well, she refused to sit in her dorm room pouting all night. There had to be something interesting going on.

There were a few doors open on her floor, people gathered in groups, watching movies or hanging out, talking. Not really finding what she was looking for, Nancy went down a floor. This floor was supposedly all guys. It did smell a little funkier than Nancy's floor, she supposed. When she got to the lounge, its doors were wide open and a single

figure sat in a corner, reading a book.

The boy behind the book wore a frown, his dark eyebrows knitted together, his lighter brown hair falling in waves around his face. He was perched with one knee up, his arm around that leg. He was cute. And his reading material was a thick book that hinted he might be much less vapid than others.

Feeling brave, Nancy went into the room, sitting down next to the boy. When he looked over, she gave him a smile. "Hello."

"Uh, hey," he said, looking around like he expected to see other people with her. "Is there a *thing* starting in here soon? I can move somewhere else."

"Not that I know of," Nancy told him. "My roommate ditched me to go to a party, so I'm just looking for someone to hang out with. What are you reading?"

The boy showed her the front cover of his book. Nancy recognized it as a high-fantasy adventure story that she'd found on her little brother's bookshelf and read out of boredom. "Did you read the one before this, too? Besh was my favorite character."

He looked surprised, like he couldn't imagine Nancy enjoying a book like that. "I'm more of an Ayog person."

"Yeah, I can see that," she replied with an amused smile. Sticking her hand out, she said, "I'm Nancy. I live upstairs."

"Jonathan," he told her, shaking her hand. "I live on this floor."

Nancy chuckled a little at his explanation. Of course he lived here. "Any reason you're reading in the common room, rather than your room?"

Rolling his eyes, Jonathan said, "My roommate has his girlfriend over. I'm giving them a few hours alone."

"Ah." Pointing to the book in Jonathan's hands, Nancy said, "I have to admit, I only started reading the series because of my brother. I liked it more than I thought I would. As much as I love the classics,

there's something more exciting about swords and magic." She grinned.

Jonathan laughed, and Nancy was struck by the beauty of his smile. "Yeah, I know what you mean. It's more exciting than real life, anyway." He shifted in his seat turning more toward her. "I read a lot of other stuff, too." He tilted the book to show her the library sticker on the back. "First thing I did when I got here was get a library card."

"Oh, you're ahead of me," Nancy told him. "I've been so preoccupied with classes starting, and meeting people, and finding my way around, I haven't read for fun since I got here."

"I didn't..." Jonathan cleared his throat. "I haven't put much time into meeting anyone."

Nodding, Nancy asked, "And that's why I found you reading alone on a Friday night?"

"Guilty," he said, giving her another one of those disarming smiles.

"Do you do anything else for fun?"

Jonathan shrugged. "I like movies. Sometimes I take pictures."

Intrigued, Nancy asked, "Pictures of what?"

"Anything, I—" he started, but cut himself off at a shout in the hallway.

"...believe you would *like* stuff like that! God!" cried a girl, passing the lounge and pressing the button for the elevator just outside. She had her blonde hair in a high ponytail, and she wore a Hawkins U sweatshirt over a pair of very short pink shorts.

A guy followed her past the lounge, saying, "Come on, Becky! It's not that big of a deal!"

"It's a gateway to the devil!" The elevator dinged and Becky got on it. "Lose my number, Steve. Don't ever call me again!"

"Aren't Christians all about *forgiveness*?" Steve called, the volume of

his voice raising as the elevator doors closed.

Nancy shared a concerned look with Jonathan, but before she could ask him if he knew what that had been about, Steve stuck his head in the lounge door. Cringing, he asked, "How much of that did you guys hear?"

"Uh, *most* of it," Nancy told him.

As Steve came into the room, Nancy got a better look at him. He was fairly handsome, with brown hair that was perfectly styled, and dark, twinkling eyes. His clothes were nicer than average: an expensive-looking blue striped polo shirt and khaki pants that fit so well they looked tailored. He lifted a hand to scratch the back of his head, before saying, "Well, I guess *that's* over. You can come back to the room if you want."

For a second, Nancy thought this Steve guy was propositioning her with no preamble. Then she realized that Steve was actually speaking to Jonathan.

"I..." Jonathan said, looking over at Nancy, almost like he was asking her permission to stay. It was the lounge on *his* floor. If anything, Nancy thought *she* should be the one to ask permission to stay.

"Unless you're good here?" Steve said, giving Jonathan that permission he seemed to be looking for. He crossed the lounge and held his hand out to Nancy. "Steve Harrington. Nice to meet you."

"Nancy Wheeler," she replied. Nodding toward the elevator, she asked, "Does that happen a lot?"

"No," he said with a scowl before dropping into a nearby chair. Addressing Jonathan, he said, "She saw my D&D stuff and freaked out."

"Ah." Jonathan glanced over at Nancy, as if he wanted to check whether she was going to freak out too. When she just shrugged, he turned back to Steve and said, "Why didn't you just tell her it was my stuff or something?"

Steve's mouth fell open and he stared past the wall behind them for a

second. When he snapped back into focus, he told Jonathan, "That didn't occur to me. At all."

Nancy couldn't help but ask Jonathan, "You're not worried about people thinking you play?"

"Anyone who would care isn't someone that matters to me," he told her.

Impressed by how he'd phrased that, Nancy nodded toward the elevator. "People like Becky?"

He chuckled. "Exactly."

"But she was so hot..." Steve groaned before sighing wistfully.

"You really wanted to date her?" Jonathan asked, like he couldn't understand what Steve saw in a girl like Becky.

"She was very pretty, from what I saw," Nancy said. "I'm sure she's going to make a good pastor's wife someday."

Jonathan laughed and Steve spluttered.

"Maybe it's good the D&D scared her off," Nancy continued. "She would've tried to recruit you into her messianic cult. You saved yourself a lifetime of brainwashing, my friend."

Steve shrugged. "You've got me there. Still. Wouldn't be the worst thing a girl has ever dragged me into."

"That sounds like a story to me," Nancy said. "Is that how you got into D&D?"

"Nah, that was this kid I used to babysit. Dustin. He's in eighth grade this year." The soft look on Steve's face told her just about everything she needed to know about who he was as a person.

Jonathan spoke up, finally marking his place and closing his book, engaging with the conversation. "My brother's in eighth this year too."

“Mine’s in ninth,” Nancy told them. “But he skipped first grade, so he’s the same age.”

Gesturing toward Nancy, Steve asked, “So how come D&D hasn’t scared *you* off?”

Nancy smirked. “My brother runs a campaign. Every now and then I play with them. My ranger is level seven.”

Scooting forward in his seat, Steve asked, “Holy, shit, really?” Jonathan gave her a surprised look as well.

“Really,” Nancy told them with a self-satisfied nod.

Steve looked like he was about to jump out of his seat in excitement. “That’s so great! Oh, man, I’m glad Jonathan met you! My best friend and I were talking about starting a new campaign, and we need some players!”

“Best friend?” Nancy asked.

“Robin. You’ll love her. She’s great,” Steve insisted quickly before turning to Jonathan. “Will you join our campaign now? Please? It’ll be so much fun!”

Jonathan squirmed a little before telling Nancy, “I don’t know how to play.”

“It’s a little complex,” Nancy admitted. “But we can help you.”

“At least give it a shot,” Steve added. “One session. It’ll be like three, four hours and if you don’t like it, I won’t ask again.”

“Fine,” Jonathan told him. “But you’ll for sure stop asking?”

“Cross my heart.”

Nancy grinned. “This is gonna be fun.”

~*~

“I got a third player for our campaign,” Steve said, walking in

through Robin's open door and dropping down onto her bed, making the milk in Robin's cereal bowl slosh around a bit.

"Please tell me it's not that Keith guy," Robin said around a mouthful of captain crunch. "You know he'd be a total rules Nazi and I will not have that at my table."

Steve grinned and said, "It's this girl Nancy, from the fourth floor. She's played to level seven in her brother's campaign."

Robin dropped her spoon into the bowl. "Are you serious?"

Confused, Steve slowly said, "...yes?"

"That's awesome! Another girl at the table? Hell yes!" Grinning, Robin held up her hand, letting Steve give her a high-five. "And you convinced Jonathan?"

"Pretty sure Nancy did." Steve smirked. "Jonathan's got a big old crush on her already. I'm positive he'd jump in Hawkins lake if she asked him to."

Robin slurped some of the milk out of her bowl before asking, "Speaking of crushes, how did your date go last night? What was her name? Beth or something?"

"Becky." Steve pouted. "She saw my player's handbook and flipped out. I thought she was going to start throwing holy water on me or something."

"I told you so."

"Yeah, yeah." When Robin handed him the box of cereal, Steve took it and pulled out a handful, munching thoughtfully. "What class should I play?"

Robin grinned at him.

They said at the same time, "Bard!"

Steve laughed. "Dustin never let me play one because that was *his* class."

“Perfect opportunity. Jonathan doesn’t seem like the kind of person who would fight you for it.” Robin took the box of cereal back and set it on her desk. “What about Nancy?”

“She’s...” Steve found he was smiling. “She’s *funny*, but not so much in a Bard way. I guess we can ask her.”

“See if they can both have lunch with us in the cafeteria today. We can discuss who’s gonna be what.” Robin set her cereal bowl aside to wash later and stood up, going to her closet. Looking through her clothes, she asked, “What sort of outfit says I am a benevolent dictator, but those who cross me will regret it?”

“The jacket with the spikes,” Steve suggested, pointing to the left side of her closet. “And like your grumpy bear t-shirt.”

Robin turned and grinned at him. “I *never* would have thought of that combination, but I think I like it.” She laughed and pulled the jacket out of her closet. “I knew there was a reason I keep you around.”

“Well, it’s not for my masculine good looks, that’s for sure.”

“For sure,” Robin agreed. She came over and gave Steve her hand, pulling him to his feet. “I’m gonna change. See you in the cafeteria? Around noon?”

“See you there!”

~*~

“I don’t know,” Jonathan said, flipping through the book Robin had pushed across the table at him. “What do you guys think I should play?”

“Well, if I’m a paladin,” Nancy said, “and Steve’s a bard, we could maybe use someone with some stealth?”

“Yeah, a rogue,” Steve said, flipping pages until he got to the right one. “With this one, you’d hide in the shadows, catch people unaware, pick pockets, steal things. Lots of useful abilities.”

“I don’t know.” Jonathan squirmed a little in his seat. This was

starting to seem more complicated than just indulging his new roommate's special interest. "Is there anything less... criminal?"

From across the table, Robin leaned forward and asked, "What about a ranger? You'd keep to the back of the party, use your keen eye to notice things, be a marksman with your bow and arrow? Rangers are really stealthy, but more in a hunter sort of way than a thief sort of way."

Jonathan wasn't quite sure what that meant, but it sounded a lot better than anything else he'd been presented with. "Yeah. That one."

"Fuck yeah, man!" Steve said with a grin. "Ranger fits you perfectly. I know it!"

Reaching for the book, Nancy said, "May I?"

Jonathan nodded and handed it over.

As she took it, Nancy told Robin, "I don't have any dice. I always used my brother's. Is that going to be a problem?"

"Dice? Like Yahtzee?" Jonathan asked.

Steve patted the top of Jonathan's head twice before Jonathan smacked his hand away.

"I brought, like, all my dice from home," Robin replied to Nancy's question. "We'll be fine."

"Great," Jonathan said.

So far, the only thing he liked about this game was how excited it made Nancy and Steve. He noticed someone watching Nancy read the book for a few seconds before shaking their head and making a comment to the person sitting beside them. Jonathan didn't have any illusions that coming to college on a scholarship would make him any more popular than he had been during high school. Joining his roommate's D&D club certainly wouldn't help either.

That was okay. Jonathan didn't like most people. He didn't need them to like him in return. He wouldn't mind so much if *Nancy* liked

him, but he wasn't holding his breath, waiting for it to happen. Jonathan had no idea why Steve seemed to like him so much either. He was handsome and charming enough to make friends with just about anyone. Like, it was nice to be on friendly terms with your roommate, but Jonathan hadn't expected Steve to talk to him constantly and ask his opinion about all sorts of topics. Jonathan didn't expect Steve to share his favorite books and rope Jonathan into a role playing game with his best friend, who unexpectedly was a girl.

As they left the cafeteria, Nancy said, "Oh, Jonathan. I have a book I wanted to show you. Why don't you come with me to my room for a minute?"

"Sure," Jonathan said, confused when Steve gave him an excited thumbs up. They broke off from the others, taking the elevators up to the fourth floor. "What book did you want to show me?"

"Oh, it's this one that I absolutely love. Similar to what Steve recommended, but much better characters, I think." Nancy told him. "It's called *Redbird*."

The elevator dinged and Jonathan followed Nancy down the hallway. "What's it about?"

"Magic gone haywire. War. Love. All that good stuff." Nancy unlocked her door and opened it. "Good, my roommate's not here."

"She's not a fantasy fan?"

Rolling her eyes, Nancy said. "She's not a fan of reading in general. I'm just glad she's a fashion major and not in education or something. I would weep for her future students."

Nancy closed the door and crossed the room to the shelves over her desk. Reaching for them pulled her shirt up, and Jonathan saw a quick flash of the skin on her side. His fingers twitched and his face heated up and he had to look away so he wouldn't do something stupid. When Nancy returned, Jonathan made himself look back at her. She had a hardcover book clutched to her chest and was looking up at him with this vulnerable sort of expression. Was she afraid he

was going to insult her favorite book or something?

"I actually..." she said, before giving a frustrated sigh. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure?"

Looking up at Jonathan she asked, "Can I kiss you? Like, is that something you'd want to—"

"Y-yeah," Jonathan interrupted her, sure his heart was beating loud enough for her to hear. "Yes."

Nancy grinned and stepped closer, tilting her face up and waiting for him to close the distance. Jonathan had no idea what he was doing, but he pressed his lips to Nancy's. She kissed him once, then wrapped a hand around the back of his neck, holding him close and kissing him again. The corner of Nancy's book dug into Jonathan's chest, but he barely felt it, focusing instead on the delicate softness of Nancy's lips and the smell of her skin and how nice it felt to slide his fingers into her hair.

Nancy's tongue brushed his lower lip and the feeling surged through his body, stealing his breath, making him want to step closer and press tightly against her. The book and Nancy's arm between them stymied his efforts. It was probably for the best, he thought as he stepped back and dropped his hands down onto her arms, not quite ready to let go. She laughed softly and smiled up at Jonathan. He smiled back and decided he was already deeply, deeply in love with her.

The door behind them opened and a girl with red hair came into the room. "Oh, hey," she said, sounding as uninterested as a person could get.

"Carol, this is Jonathan," Nancy said, pulling him a little closer to make room for Carol in the aisle between their two beds. "Jonathan, my roommate, Carol."

"Hi," Jonathan said, receiving a cool arch of Carol's right eyebrow before she snapped her chewing gum and turned, hanging up her

jacket in her closet. Jonathan turned back to Nancy, raising his eyebrows.

She shook her head and rolled her eyes. “Anyway, here’s that book I was telling you about.” Nancy pressed the book into his hands. “Let me know what you think.”

“Yeah, sure,” Jonathan said, liking the way the book was still warm from Nancy’s hands. “I’ll, um...” Carol stalked by and flounced down onto her bed. “I’ll see you later.”

“Later,” Nancy agreed, walking with Jonathan to the door. She stopped him there with a hand on his arm. “Maybe dinner? Tonight? In the cafeteria?”

Jonathan nodded. He had homework he needed to finish before class the following day, but maybe he could get most of it done before then. “Sure. Should I come get you, or—?”

“I’ll come to you,” Nancy said with a soft scoff in the direction of her roommate, who was flipping through a magazine.

“Sure,” Jonathan said with a nod. “See you then.”

“Bye.”

Jonathan took the stairs down a floor and ambled down the hallway, looking over the book Nancy had given him. He got engrossed in the summary on the flap and almost walked right past his room.

The door stood open and Steve sat at his desk, a textbook open and the radio on the windowsill softly playing the top 40 station. When Jonathan came in, he looked up and cracked a grin. “So?” he asked, setting down his pencil. “How did it go?”

Seeing no reason to omit what had happened, Jonathan told Steve, “She kissed me.”

“Haha!” Steve said, throwing his hands in the air. “I knew it! I knew she liked you!”

Jonathan couldn’t help but grin. He set Nancy’s book on his desk and

dropped down into his chair. “We’re having dinner together tonight. Just at the cafeteria, but it’s something, huh?”

“Look at you! Not even a month into college and you’ve already got yourself a girlfriend!” Steve laughed again and put his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder, giving him a good-natured shake. “Regular old Casanova here!”

Jonathan snorted and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, not so much. She made the first move.”

“So, what?” Steve asked, turning further in his chair and lowering his voice. “How’d it go down? Give me the details!”

“It’s not—” Jonathan shrugged. “She asked if she could kiss me. I said yes. Then she kissed me.”

Steve narrowed his eyes at Jonathan. “You have a real way with words, you know that? Very poetical.”

Jonathan laughed and gave Steve a shove. “Shut up. I’m turning away and doing my homework now.”

“Too bad Becky didn’t work out,” Steve said, turning back to his work. “We could’ve gone on double dates.”

“I doubt it’ll take you long to find a new Miss Right.”

“Nancy doesn’t have a twin sister, by chance, does she?”

Jonathan laughed. “Not that I know of. She’s got a bitchy roommate, though. Carol.”

“Carol?” Steve asked. “Red hair, always chewing gum?”

“Another ex of yours?” Jonathan turned to look at Steve.

He shook his head. “I saw her on move-in day, didn’t say hello. We went to high school together. She dated my ex-best friend for a few years.”

Even though he had work to do so he could enjoy the evening with

Nancy, Jonathan couldn't help but ask Steve, "Ex-best friend? What happened?"

"He...said some shit about Robin," Steve admitted. "I picked a fight over it, he kicked my ass, friendship over."

"Jesus," Jonathan muttered. "He's not going here, is he?"

Steve shook his head. "Nah. He got in someplace on the East Coast. His dad's alma mater, I think."

"Well, that's something at least."

"Yeah." Then, as if he couldn't let a conversation end on a bad note like that, Steve said, "Hey, if you're ditching me for dinner, that means Robin and I can work on my character's backstory. Ooh, I've got the best ideas. It's gonna be so good!"

Jonathan laughed and shook his head, getting back to the paper he needed to write.

2. Chapter 2

“You find yourselves walking through a market. Stalls line the dusty cobblestone road of Osilian, a mid-sized city on the coast of the Elven nation of Mytodorei,” Robin said, her voice with just as much dramatic flair as Mike had ever put into his descriptions.

Grinning, Nancy jotted down the names Robin dropped in the notebook she’d dedicated to the campaign. She was sitting across from Robin, with Jonathan on her right and Steve on her left. Steve had his own notebook and pencil, along with a set of dice. The only thing in front of Jonathan was his character sheet.

“The stalls are filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, meats, and other various sundries and supplies. You all find yourselves at a booth filled with cured sausages of all shapes and flavors, when suddenly, there’s a scream! A few booths down, you see a pack of five goblins! They growl at the people around and start stuffing fish into their bags! You hear a voice call out, ‘Summon the guard!’ The owner of the fish stall is an elderly man. He tries to stop the goblins, but one of them stabs him with a dagger. The man cries out and falls. What do you do?”

“I can’t stand seeing innocent people get hurt,” Nancy said, chewing on the end of her pencil for a second. “I draw my sword and go over there. ‘Hey, assholes! Leave these people alone!’”

In a funny voice, Robin said, “‘Or what?’ asks the biggest goblin. You see he’s holding a shield and a spiky mace.”

“Or I’ll be forced to bring you to Justice,” Nancy replied, grinning first at Robin and Steve, then over to Jonathan.

Steve chimed in, “I see this happening and I grab one of the people. ‘You! Go summon the guard!’ I say before drawing my dagger and joining the very beautiful paladin. ‘Need some help, Gorgeous?’”

Giggling, Nancy said, “That’s Lady Yvonne to you, but yes, that would be lovely, thanks!”

“I need everyone to roll initiative!”

Once the turn order was sorted out, Nancy got to wound the lead goblin with her sword, and Steve managed to stab one of the other ones. Then it was Jonathan’s turn.

Robin said to him, “Okay, you’re about forty feet away from the battle. There are five goblins, one of whom looks ready to stab the old man again. What are you going to do?”

“Shoot an arrow at him?” Jonathan asked.

Robin handed Jonathan a purple 20-sided die. “Roll that and add four.”

Shrugging, Jonathan rolled the die to the middle of the table. The number facing up was a twenty! Nancy shrieked with excitement and Steve said, “Beginner’s luck! Alright!”

“What does a 20 mean?”

“That means you score a critical hit,” Robin told him. “Your prowess with a bow is no match for the chaos of the scene. You line up your shot and let loose the arrow, which sinks deep into the back of the goblin. Roll this die twice.” She handed him an eight sided die.

Obligingly, Jonathan rolled it. “Seven and a six. Thirteen?”

“Plus your other modifiers. That’s a seventeen total. The goblin drops his dagger and keels over, dead!” Robin grinned and shook Jonathan a little by the shoulder. “Good job, dude!”

Jonathan smiled first at Robin, then at Nancy. “I guess Symon is good with a bow.”

“He certainly is!”

After all the goblins were dead, Steve grinned. “Hail, and well-met, fellow adventurers,” he said, offering his hand to Nancy, who laughed and shook it. “I am Arlen Bysalor. Maybe you’ve heard of me?”

Shaking her head, Nancy said, “No. Should I have?”

Steve gasped, “My dear lady, I am shocked. You stuck me as someone cultured. Perhaps I shall have to sing for you. I’m sure you’ve heard at least one of my songs.” Before letting Nancy respond, Steve turned to Jonathan. “And you! That was some impressive skill! And from such a handsome fellow! Tell me, what’s your name?”

“Uh, Symon,” Jonathan replied.

“A man of few words, I take it?” Steve grinned. “I go up to him and lean my head on his shoulder and say, ‘Surely *you*’ve heard of me?’”

“Arlen?”

“Bysalor, yes! That’s me!”

“Never heard of you.”

Steve sighed melodramatically. “Oh, you wound me so! Perhaps I need to perform more feats of valor, so my name becomes known far and wide!” He grinned at Jonathan and winked at Nancy. “I’m sure with you two at my side, we’d make a name for ourselves in no time flat.”

“What’s in it for me?” Jonathan asked, which made Nancy grin. He was getting the hang of it.

Steve told him, “I’ll give you a kiss!” When Jonathan remained stone-faced, Steve relented. “Fine, fine. Equal shares of any rewards we earn or treasure we find.”

“That sounds perfect for me,” Nancy said. “After all, I need gold so I can pay for the repairs to my parents’ castle and restore our good name among the peerage. What about you, Symon?”

“I like money,” he said with a shrug.

“Then it’s settled! We’ll adventure together!” Steve turned to Robin. “What happens after we kill the goblins?”

“Well,” Robin told him, looking around at Nancy and Jonathan as she

told the story of the city guard arriving and rewarding them for their service. "As they're leaving, the Captain says to you," she pointed at Nancy, "Lady Yvonne, there's been a lot of bandits on the north road out of town. If you're heading that way back to your estate, I'd recommend hiring guards to make sure you aren't set upon without protection."

"I can protect myself," I say with a stubborn scoff. Then I realize this might be a good way to earn some gold. "But thank you for the tip. Good day, Captain."

"Good day, ma'am," Robin says, tipping an imaginary cap. Then in her normal voice, she said, "What do you guys think so far? Want to take a break for a few minutes?"

"Sure!"

Nancy got up and stretched her legs, refilling her water glass from the common-room sink. As Jonathan approached her, Nancy asked him, "So what do you think? Liking the game?"

"I think," he said, putting a kiss on her cheek, "I like watching you have so much fun."

Nancy grinned and gave him a kiss on the lips. "Thanks for playing along."

"Any time," Jonathan said with a smile Nancy just had to kiss.

~*~

"Hey, thanks again for playing with us," Steve said when they got back to their dorm room. "I had a lot of fun. Did you have fun?"

"Yeah," Jonathan admitted, smiling a little as he dropped down onto his bed.

"Oh, and hey," Steve said, tapping Jonathan's knee before he sat down at his desk. "If Arlen making comments about Symon bothers you or makes you uncomfortable or whatever, I'll knock it off."

Jonathan thought about this for a second before shaking his head.

“Nah. That’s just who he is, huh? It’s funny.”

“Good,” Steve said, with what sounded like a relieved sigh. “I think so too.” Then he grinned at Jonathan. “You and Nancy are getting pretty close, huh?”

Jonathan gave a soft laugh and nodded. “Yeah. She’s...”

“She’s so pretty, man. You’re so lucky.” Steve leaned forward, pressing his palms together. “Please tell me you understand how lucky you are.”

“Oh, I understand,” Jonathan insisted. “It’s *terrifying*! How long until she realizes she’s too good for me?”

“Hey, she’s not *that* out of your league. She just spent four hours playing the nerdiest game on the planet.”

“True,” Jonathan admitted.

Steve sat back in his chair, moving his hands around as he talked. “And I mean, don’t sell yourself short either. You’re super smart! And in the right clothes, I bet you clean up so good. Really handsome, right?”

“I— I don’t know,” Jonathan said, not wanting to admit why all his clothes were so crappy and ill-fitting. They were the only ones he could afford. “The only person who’s ever called me handsome was my mom.”

“No one in high school?” Steve asked with disbelief. “Not even like the band chicks, or someone?”

“Until last year I was really skinny,” Jonathan told him. “And I never really talked to anyone.”

Steve sat up, shaking his head. “You’re breaking my heart. This cannot stand. Here,” he stood up and went to his dresser, opening the third drawer down and taking out a dark green sweater. “Put this on and come look in the mirror.”

“Steve...”

“Please? For me?” Steve asked, pouting until Jonathan relented and let Steve pull him to his feet.

Jonathan took off the hoodie he’d been wearing, but left his t-shirt in place. Rolling his eyes, he took the sweater from Steve and unfolded it before putting it on. It smelled like the detergent he used on all his clothes. Pulling the sweater down and into place, Jonathan held out his hands. “See? Still me.”

Steve grabbed his shoulders and turned him toward the mirror on the back of the door. “Look. And don’t slouch and curl in on yourself. Use these nice, broad shoulders you’ve got.”

Jonathan gave a huff, but he did as Steve asked. He stood up straight and rolled his shoulders back, and... “Huh.”

“See?” Steve said with a grin. “Very handsome. Nancy’s only a *tiny* bit out of your league.”

Jonathan laughed darkly and pulled the sweater off. “Yeah, but I can’t afford clothes like that.”

“Tell you what,” Steve said, holding up his hands so Jonathan couldn’t hand the sweater back. “You hold onto that one. When I go home for Thanksgiving, I’ll bring back a bunch of the stuff I outgrew last year. Most of it should fit you, and my mom never throws anything away. Someone should get some use out of them.”

Not really liking the idea, Jonathan held the sweater back out to him. “Steve. I don’t need fancy clothes. Nancy either likes me in my clothes or she doesn’t.”

“Okay, fine,” Steve said, taking back the sweater. “But seriously, feel free to borrow something if you go out to dinner or something.”

“Thank you,” Jonathan told him. “Really. You’re a good friend.”

Steve grinned and hugged him. “Thanks, dude!”

“You’re welcome.”

~*~

Steve chewed on his thumbnail as Nancy's character, Yvonne, went unconscious. She was the only one of them who had any healing, and his bard only had three hit points left.

"Oh, Jesus," Robin said when her dice came to a stop. "Thirteen to hit. The dire wolf just barely misses you, Arlen."

Steve let out the breath he'd been holding and looked over at Nancy, whose grim frown told him everything he needed to know. There were very few ways to get out of this now. He was out of spells, no one had any healing potions, and they'd kept missing the dire wolf, so it still had most of its hit points. It wasn't looking good, to say the least.

"Symon. It's your turn," Robin said, rubbing her left temple. There was no way she'd meant for this to be a total party kill. The dice had just... Sometimes luck just ran the wrong way. Robin looked to Jonathan. "What would you like to do?"

Jonathan looked at the table between them, where Robin had a battle map laid out, with little figures for each of the players and enemies. He frowned for a moment before saying, "I'm going to drop my bow and take out my short sword. As I run at the dire wolf, I'll yell to Arlen, 'Yvonne can't die! The world depends on it! Get her out of here.' Then I jump on the dire wolf and stab it."

"Roll for attack."

Jonathan rolled and hit, but he only did five points of damage. It wasn't enough.

"Arlen?" Robin asked carefully.

Thinking about what Jonathan had said, and what they knew about Yvonne's importance to the story they'd been building for the past four months, Steve looked Jonathan in the eyes. "You're sure?"

Jonathan nodded back. "I'm sure."

Steve sighed. "Okay."

"Steve, no..." Nancy said softly, but Steve knew he had to do what

made sense for his character.

“Arlen uses Symon’s distraction to crawl over to Yvonne. He picks her up, armor and all, and says, ‘Symon, we’ll never forget you.’ Then he gets the hell out of there as fast as he can.”

“Okay,” Robin says. “Nancy, roll a death save for Yvonne.”

Nancy held her breath and rolled the die. Letting it out in a rush, she said, “Sixteen.”

Steve breathed a sigh of relief. One more successful save and she’d stabilize, spared from death. That was good, because he probably didn’t have enough time to set her down and stabilize her with a medicine check.

Robin told them, “It’s the dire wolf’s turn. It retaliates against Symon, who’s on its back. It rolls a ...” She rolled her die and waited for it to stop. “A natural twenty. Shit. I’m so sorry, Jonathan.”

Shaking his head, Jonathan said, “Roll damage.”

Robin rolled her dice a few times before grimacing and saying, “Fifteen points of piercing damage as it bites you.”

“I’m still up,” Jonathan said, though he sounded defeated already. He probably only had a few hit points left.

“Arlen? Your turn?” Robin said as she met his eyes.

Steve looked across the table at Jonathan. “There’s nothing I can do.”

“It’s okay,” Jonathan insisted.

Nodding that he understood, Steve told Robin, “I move as far away as I can while carrying Yvonne with me.”

Somber, Robin said, “Yvonne? Death saving throw?”

Nancy rolled her d20. “Eleven. That’s three successes. I stabilize.”

Robin nodded and turned to Jonathan. “Your friends are gone and

you're face-to-face with an angry dire wolf. What do you do?"

"I try to stab it with my sword," Jonathan told her, rolling. "Fifteen to hit?"

"Hits."

"I stab the wolf and do..." He counted up his dice. "...nine points of damage. I know it's not enough so I say, 'If you have to take anyone, take me.'"

"The wolf bites you, doing...eleven damage."

"I'm down," Jonathan said.

Robin looked to Steve. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know Symon is unconscious, so I keep running. I have to get Yvonne to safety." Steve sighed, putting his hands into his hair and leaning his forehead on his palms. He couldn't bring himself to watch Jonathan's face.

"Make a death saving throw."

Steve heard the die hitting the table, rolling, and coming to a stop. "Seven."

"Failure," Robin told Jonathan. "The wolf is going to bite Symon and try to eat him. It hits, but hasn't quite killed you yet. That's a second failure. Roll one last death save."

The die was unusually loud as it hit the table. Nancy made a soft sound of protest. Jonathan said, "Five. Symon dies of his wounds. The dire wolf starts to eat him."

There was a long moment of silence. Steve looked up at the others and they all seemed stunned.

Robin cleared her throat. "Jesus, I... God, I'm so sorry. Sometimes the game..."

"We should have run," Nancy said, meeting Steve's eyes for a

moment. “When things started to turn, we could have run.”

Jonathan shrugged. “We wouldn’t have killed Sir Theodas if we’d run. It’ll serve the larger quest we were on.”

That’s when Steve realized, “*You* could have run. Symon could have left us there and gone on to live another day.”

“Come on,” Jonathan said, closing his notebook. “He’s chaotic good. Was. He *was* chaotic good. He wouldn’t have left his best friends to die. Not when he could save them.”

Nancy leaned over and wrapped her arms around Jonathan, hugging him tightly. “He was so brave.”

“He was,” Steve agreed, and he was surprised to feel his eyes watering. He dabbed them dry on his sleeve. After taking a deep, cleansing breath, Steve asked, “You’re going to roll a new character, right?”

“You can’t leave Yvonne alone with Arlen. She’ll kill him.”

Jonathan laughed at Nancy’s joke and wiped his eyes as well. He nodded, but said, “Give me a few days. I’ll think of something.”

“We’ll, um,” Robin said, closing her binder. “We’ll pick it up again next time, I guess.”

Everyone was silent as they packed up their things and headed for their rooms. It was late, and they had class the next day, so Steve got ready for bed. Once the light was off, Steve stared up at the ceiling. Softly, he said, “Dustin had a character die once. I should ask him what they did for a proper send off.”

“Yeah,” Jonathan replied from the other side of the room.

Steve turned and looked across the room at Jonathan’s silhouette. He’d sacrificed himself for Steve. Well, for him and Nancy. Maybe he was mostly thinking about Nancy when he’d done it. How come Steve was hoping Jonathan had been thinking of him, too?

Of course he was thinking about Nancy. She was the girl Jonathan

was dating. Steve was sure they'd slept together by now. They were perfect for each other. They'd probably last through college and get married and have babies. Steve would be Jonathan's old roommate, and fellow D&D player. Maybe he could hope for "good friend." Nothing more.

Wait. Nothing more?

Where had that thought come from? Jesus, it had been a long week and a brutal D&D session and Steve was tired. He just needed to sleep and get his head on right.

3. Chapter 3

“You walk into the temple,” Robin said, her attention focused on Nancy and Steve. It had been almost three weeks since they’d played last, partially to give Jonathan some time to roll a new character and partially because of midterms. Nancy thought they all probably needed some time away from the game as well. Symon’s death had been shocking and Nancy felt almost like she’d lost a real friend, even though she’d seen Jonathan every day since then.

“The high ceiling is painted with scenes from the Izemis’s scriptures,” Robin continued. “There are lit candles everywhere and the air smells like incense. There’s a marble altar at the front of the temple and an open floor in front of it. Small rugs are arranged on the floor, and you get the impression this is where people sit when they come to pray.”

Sitting to her left like always, Steve said, “I sit down on one of the carpets close to the altar. I say, ‘Hey, Izemis. It’s me, Arlen. Sorry I haven’t talked to you before. My parents worshiped Romera, so you know... Still, I’d like to ask a favor. Could you...’” Steve sighed and Nancy got the impression it wasn’t just his character who was having trouble finding the right words. “Look after my friend Symon, would you? Make sure he has lots of fun animals to hunt, wherever he is.”

Joining in, Nancy said, “Yvonne sits on the carpet next to Arlen’s and bows her head. Izemis is used to hearing from her, so she doesn’t say anything out loud, but her sentiments are similar to Arlen’s.” Nancy looked over at Jonathan and put her hand on his wrist. “She wants to make sure Symon is happy, wherever he is, and that he’s not worrying about them.”

Robin nodded at Nancy before saying, “As you finish your prayers, a figure steps from the shadows behind the altar. He’s a man with delicate features and pointed ears. His skin is dark gray, with a slight purplish tint. His black hair is pulled back into a tail at the base of his neck. He’s wearing white and yellow, with Izemis’s symbol on the chest of his tunic. A shiny brass club hangs from his white leather belt.” When she was done, Robin gestured to Jonathan.

He cleared his throat before saying, “It sounds like you lost a good

friend. I will pray to Izemis for you that he has the afterlife you'd like for him."

Nancy smiled at Jonathan. "Thanks."

Steve sighed again, but this time it was the over-exaggerated sigh that meant he was in character. "'Will you ask your Izemis to help us save the world, too? I'm not sure we can do it without Symon.'"

"'Save the world? What do you mean?'"

Robin stepped in saying, "You explain to the newcomer the nature of your quest, how you have to get Yvonne past the army of dark dwarves before the solstice or the dark god Amzotl will be unleashed."

Jonathan nodded. "I say, 'Oh, no. Not Amzotl! The world will fall into darkness.' Then I put my hand out to Yvonne and say, 'My name is Elris Wildsinger. I believe Izemis has meant for us to meet.'"

"I shake his hand and say, 'Why is that, Elris?'" Nancy grinned.

"'Because, I've had a vision of the dwarven army, and how to get past them. I think Izemis wants me to show you the way.'" Jonathan looked over at Robin, who grinned and winked.

His voice harsher than Nancy would have expected, Steve demanded, "'How do we know we can trust you?'"

Jonathan seemed unprepared for Steve's intensity as well. He looked over at Nancy, who shrugged, before licking his lips and saying, "Well, I don't suppose my position as an acolyte of Izemis will win you over. I suppose I'll have to prove myself to you as we go along."

"I don't like it."

Putting a hand on Steve's arm, Nancy asked him, "What choice do we have? We're not strong enough to make it, just the two of us. If Elris has been given a vision and tasked with helping us, shouldn't we let him give it his best?"

"When you put it that way..." Steve put his hand over Nancy's, the

dry warmth of his hand gentle and reassuring. Then he narrowed his eyes at Jonathan. “Keep in mind, you’re on thin ice.”

Jonathan rolled his eyes and leaned away from the table. When Nancy met Robin’s eyes, she didn’t seem to know what to do either. An idea popping into her head, Nancy said, “I tell Elris, ‘Just a minute,’ and then I drag Arlen to the back of the chamber by his ear. ‘What’s your problem, asshole?’”

Steve grinned for a second before saying, “Ow, ow! Let go!”

“I let go.”

“I pout and say, ‘It just feels we’re *replacing* Symon.’”

Not quite sure what Steve was getting at, Nancy told him, “We are.”

“It’s not that easy,” Steve insisted. “What if Symon can still see us from wherever he is? Don’t you think he’d be pissed at how quickly we’ve replaced him?”

Oh! Now Nancy understood what Steve was doing. “I nod my head and I tell Arlen, ‘Losing Symon was a terrible tragedy, but don’t you think he’d want us to continue on without him? He wouldn’t want us to just give up, right?’”

“Right,” Steve said. “But don’t expect me to be all buddy-buddy with the new guy right off the bat.”

Nancy laughed. “But you’re all buddy-buddy with everyone. Remember that halfling? Sharbin? You knew him ten minutes before you declared him your best friend.”

When Steve spoke again, it was obvious he was speaking out of character. “Okay, if you guys aren’t cool with this next bit, we’ll just pretend it didn’t happen.”

“What next bit?” Robin asked him, and Nancy felt a little better about having no idea what Steve was up to, if Robin didn’t know either.

“Arlen keeps his voice low as he tells Yvonne, ‘I miss Symon more

than you do because I was in love with him.” Steve let that line linger as he looked around the table.

Nancy wasn’t sure how to react. It had never occurred to her that Arlen might fall in love with Symon. Then she realized it made all the flirting make more sense. She looked over at Jonathan and found she couldn’t read what he was thinking. His face was just completely *blank*.

On the other hand, Robin looked delighted, at least until she caught sight of Jonathan’s expression as well.

Steve reached across the table, putting his hand on the table in front of Jonathan. “If it makes you uncomfortable, I’ll take it back.”

After a few more seconds, Jonathan shook his head. “No, I think it makes a lot of sense. You can keep it.”

Steve nodded, then met Nancy’s eyes. “If you’re not comfortable with it either, I can—”

“No, I don’t mind,” Nancy assured him. She knew what people assumed about her values, having grown up in the house she did with such dyed-in-the-wool Republicans as parents, but she also took pride in thinking for herself. And thinking for herself, Nancy couldn’t see anything wrong with loving someone else. She told Steve, “Arlen’s your character. He should be the way you want him to be.”

Steve nodded. Then, his voice signaling he was back in character, he said, “Don’t get me wrong, the ladies turn my head, too.”

With a laugh, Nancy spoke in character as well. ““Yes, Arlen, we’re all very well aware how much you like the ladies.”” She rolled her eyes. ““I understand how it must be hard for you to let Symon go, but could you give Elris a chance? He might be just the person we need to help us finish this thing without dying.””

“I call across the temple, ‘Hey, new guy! Got any useful abilities?’”

Jonathan gave Steve an indulgent smile and a shake of his head before answering. “I’m quite good at healing, if that’s something you’re in need of. And sometimes, when I call out to Izemis, he

answers by wounding my enemies.”

“Arlen tells Yvonne, ‘I guess we can keep him around for a little while.’”

The rest of the session was spent preparing their characters to leave the city and strike out across the wilderness to reach the temple in the dark-dwarf stronghold. As they packed up, Nancy asked Jonathan, “Walk me back to my room?”

“Of course,” he said, putting the last of his things in his backpack. “Thanks, Robin. Steve, I’ll see you back at our room.”

Robin and Steve said their goodbyes and hung back in the basement lounge where their group had been playing every Wednesday night all school year. Nancy took Jonathan’s hand, and they got on the elevator. After Nancy pushed the button for her floor and the door had closed, she turned to Jonathan and asked, “You had no idea he was going to do that, huh?”

“No idea,” Jonathan replied with a shrug. “I mean, he talked about how he had some ideas for his character, but nothing he said made me think he was going to do *that*.”

“But you’re okay with it, right?” Nancy asked him, watching Jonathan’s face carefully. By this point, she knew him pretty well, but sometimes people could surprise you. What if he had a problem with gay people? Or, bisexual, she supposed was what Steve was going for with Arlen.

Jonathan nodded. “Yeah. I mean, if that’s what he wants for Arlen, that’s what he should do. It doesn’t really affect me, since Symon’s...”

“Dead, yeah,” Nancy said with a nod. The elevator door opened and they got out, still holding hands. Halfway down the hallway, a thought occurred to her. “Do you think Steve’s...?”

“I didn’t until just now,” Jonathan told her, stopping short. “Do *you* think he’s...?”

Nancy shrugged. “I mean, not necessarily. He could just be having fun with his character.”

“Yeah, that’s probably what it is,” Jonathan told her. “Just having fun with the character. I’m sure you’re right.”

~*~

As soon as Nancy and Jonathan got onto the elevator and out of sight, Robin smacked Steve’s arm.

“Ow!” he cried, rubbing his arm where she’d hit. “What was that for?”

“You didn’t have to spring that on me!” she said, putting a few more things in her backpack. “Arlen was in gay love with Symon? Really?”

“Why do *you* have a problem with that?” Steve asked her. “Of all people, I thought you’d—”

Robin hissed at him, looking around the otherwise empty lounge and out the door into the hallway. “Keep your voice down.”

“Sorry,” Steve said in a whisper. He moved closer to Robin and kept his voice low as he repeated himself. “I thought of all people, you wouldn’t have a problem with Arlen being not-straight.”

“I don’t have a problem with it,” Robin insisted, sighing as she sat on the table and looked up at him. “I think it’s actually pretty cool. I just... a little warning next time is all I’m asking. So I can keep a straight face.”

Steve couldn’t help but snicker at her choice of words, earning himself another smack on the arm. “Ow.”

Robin bit her lip for a moment before looking back at him. “Steve? Is this something you’ve been thinking about the whole campaign? Or is it something you decided to bring in now that Symon’s dead?”

“It’s been a recent development,” Steve told her, not wanting to look over, because what if her reaction wasn’t what he was hoping it would be? “I only realized it after Jonathan had Symon sacrifice himself for Arlen.”

Her voice so soft it sounded almost like a breath, she asked “Realized

what?"

"I might, maybe, have a tiny, little..." Steve had to take a breath and steel himself before he could finish the sentence. "...crush."

"On Jonathan?"

Steve had been trying to deny it for a few weeks now, but he knew it was the truth. "Yeah."

"Steve," Robin said, putting her arm around his shoulders. "It's okay. It's totally normal to have crushes on people."

"Even your roommate?" Steve asked, rubbing at his face with his hand. "Because I've got to admit, I've felt more than a little tortured the past week or so."

Robin told him, "You've just gotta get through it, you know? Ride it out until it fades. I mean, Jonathan and Nancy are..."

"Yeah, I know." Steve gave a humorless chuckle. "Kinda have a crush on her, too, if we're being completely honest."

"I know what you mean." Robin wrapped her other arm around Steve and hugged him. "Hey, we'll get through this together, alright? You and me. Best friends for life."

Warmth spread through him at her words, and he couldn't help but smile. "Yeah, for life. Always."

~*~

Robin grinned across the table at Nancy. "The guard asks, 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'"

"I, uh," Nancy looked over at Steve, who shrugged, then at Jonathan.

Thinking he might have a way out of this, Jonathan said, "'Don't you know who this is? This is *Princess* Yvonne of ...'" Shit. He should have had a place name prepared. Jonathan blurted the first thing that came to mind. "'Oglistan.'"

Across the table, Steve mouthed, “Oglistan?” back at him. Jonathan shrugged.

With a laugh, Robin said, “That sounds like you’re trying to lie. Make a deception roll!”

“Okay...” Jonathan rolled his die and it landed just in front of Steve.

“That’s a seventeen!” Steve announced, grinning across the table at him.

“For an eighteen total,” Jonathan told Robin, who rolled her own die.

Robin grinned. “The guard backs down, stammering, ‘I-I’m sorry, your highness.’ He bows so deeply the feather on his helmet almost reaches the ground.” Robin laughed and Jonathan couldn’t help but join her, glad his deception had worked. “Then the guard says to Yvonne, ‘Do you want separate quarters for your attendants, Your Highness?’”

“No!” Nancy cried before slipping out of character. “We can’t get separated. Not when the Count could notice at any time we’ve brought the amulet into the castle. Splitting the party is the worst thing we can do.”

When she looked over to him, Jonathan nodded. “That’s a good point.”

“What do you tell the guard?” Robin asked them.

Steve started to say, “We’re the princess’s...” He trailed off before finishing the thought.

“They’re my consorts!” Nancy said all of a sudden. “They sleep in my chambers with me!”

“Uh...” Robin said, looking at Steve, who shrugged, then at Jonathan. What else could he do but shrug as well. They were in it now. They might as well see it through. Robin said to Nancy, “Roll deception for me.”

Nancy rolled her die and then slumped down. “Eleven.”

“Piggy-backing off Jonathan’s roll, that’s good enough,” Robin said. “The guard gives you a curious glance, but then says, ‘I guess I don’t know much about Oglistan. My apologies, Your Highness. Let me show you to your room.’ He takes you down the hallway and up two flights of stairs, back down another hallway and shows you into the last door on the left. ‘Here you go. I’ll send up a page right away, so we can make sure all your needs are attended to while you’re a guest of King Dirvold.’”

“Yvonne says, ‘Thank you. You may go.’” Nancy winced at Jonathan. “Sorry! It was the only thing I could think of!”

Steve laughed before saying, “Arlen wiggles his eyebrows and says, ‘I never knew you thought of me that way, my lady.’”

“Get over yourself. I don’t,” Nancy giggled.

Jonathan couldn’t help but laugh, too. After all, this was far from the weirdest situation their characters had found themselves in over the course of the game.

They played on, through meeting King Dirvold, and then interrogating the summit guests until they found one that knew something about the amulet and how they could use it to defeat the dragon that guarded the Durugar temple. At one point, they were talking to an Earl from Napelle, when Robin rolled a die behind her screen. Looking over the screen at the three of them, she said, “You see the earl’s eyebrow twitch and his eyes narrow. He looks like he might be questioning whether you’re who you claim to be.”

Jonathan asked Robin, “Can I roll insight to see how badly our con is going over?”

“Sure.”

He rolled his die and added his Wisdom modifier before announcing with a grin on his face, “Twenty-two.”

Robin leaned forward, her elbows on the table, her hands clasped just under her chin. “He’s teetering on the edge. You think if you can give him just one good piece of evidence in your favor, he’ll start

believing you without question.”

Hmm, evidence. Evidence. Well, Jonathan supposed Elris had to convince the Earl that he and Yvonne were lovers. Well there was a good way to do that, he supposed. “Elris leans closer to Yvonne and says so the Earl can hear him, ‘My love, would you like me to fetch you anything?’ Then he leans closer and whispers, ‘You’re gonna have to kiss me to make him believe it.’”

With a grin, Nancy said, “Yvonne tells Elris, ‘No thank you, darling,’ and then pulls him into a kiss, full on the lips.” She stood halfway up in her chair and leaned close to Jonathan, pulling him into a kiss, too.

He laughed against her lips, but then kissed her back as best he could while still smiling.

After Nancy sat down, Steve said, “Arlen whispers to Yvonne, ‘You’re gonna have to kiss me too. Otherwise they’ll start to realize we’re BS-ing them.’”

Nancy laughed. “Yvonne kisses Arlen too.”

Steve puckered his lips, but Nancy laughed and pushed him away.

“She kisses him in the *game*, Steve!”

“Damn!” Steve smacked the table and shook his head, but his full grin made Jonathan confident he was only joking.

As the session was winding down, Robin told them, “You go back to your room and its one bed. How do you guys sleep?”

“Is it a big bed?” Nancy asked.

Robin told her. “It’s fairly big. It’s a fancy four-poster bed with a thick mattress and expensive silk bedding. Of course, you wouldn’t expect less from a room in King Dirvold’s castle.”

“Elris offers to sleep on the floor.”

“Don’t be silly,” Nancy told him. “A king like Dirvold is bound to

have his staff spying on everyone staying here. We all have to sleep in the bed. If they find out we're not who we say we are..."

"That's a lot of trouble we can't afford," Steve agreed. "Arlen is delighted to get into the bed. He looks at Yvonne and pats the mattress next to him."

Nancy laughed, and Jonathan kept waiting to feel jealous, but it didn't happen. He supposed it was only a game, after all.

"Yvonne gets into bed next to Arlen and tells him, 'If you try any funny business, I'll stab you.'"

"Okay, okay!" Steve cried, putting his hands up. "I have to let you know, I'm a sleep-cuddler. I might not be able to help myself while I'm unconscious."

Jonathan offered, "I'll sleep in the middle, if you'd like, My Lady. Protect you from Arlen."

"Aw, you'd do that for me?" Nancy grinned. "I accept. Elris sleeps in the middle of the bed."

Giggling, Robin said, "Alright. You fall asleep all squished together and we'll pick it back up next time!"

"That's not how I expected that to go," Jonathan admitted.

"Right?" Steve asked from across the table. He turned to Nancy and asked, "Consorts? Really?"

She shrugged. "It was the only thing I could think of!"

"I hope you know Arlen is never going to stop bragging that Yvonne kissed him."

"He's gonna be insufferable," Jonathan agreed.

"That's a problem for a later date," Nancy said, clutching her D&D folder to her chest. "I have a test in the morning, so I've got to go get some last-minute studying in. Walk with me?" Nancy asked Jonathan.

“Sure.”

Like always, Nancy waited for the elevator door to close before she revealed what was on her mind. “How would you feel,” she began, staring straight ahead and not looking at Jonathan, “if Yvonne had feelings for both Elris and Arlen?”

Jonathan thought about this for a moment. “She’s going to have to pick one of them eventually, isn’t she?”

“Not necessarily.” Nancy bit her lip and looked over at him as the elevator doors opened. “I mean, it’s a fantasy game. We can do pretty much whatever we want, and the only consequences are in-game.”

Jonathan nodded and followed Nancy out of the elevator and toward her room. “I suppose you’re right.” Still, a thought flitted around in his mind, begging to be let out. He stopped Nancy outside her door and asked in a whisper, “Is that just something you think Yvonne would want? Or is it something *you* want?”

“Me?” Nancy asked, her eyes wide and almost frightened. “No, I’d never... I wouldn’t do that to you. Never!”

That sounded a lot like she did, or *could have* feelings for Steve, but she valued her relationship with Jonathan too much to acknowledge them. Not knowing what he wanted to do with that information, Jonathan just said, “Okay. I trust you, Nance. I love you, okay?”

“I love you, too,” she said, pushing up on her toes to kiss him. Jonathan kissed her back, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close. “Good luck studying.”

Nancy nodded. “Lunch tomorrow?”

“See you then.”

Jonathan gave Nancy one last kiss before heading for the stairs. He went down one flight and to the room he shared with Steve. When he got to the room, Steve was halfway through changing his shirt. They’d been rooming together for most of the school year. Steve had changed his shirt in front of Jonathan probably hundreds of times. Why did this time feel so...?

It gave Jonathan a shivery pain in his stomach not unlike the first few times Nancy had taken *her* clothes off in front of him. Jonathan pushed the feeling away, saying, "Hey."

"Hey," Steve said in reply, and Jonathan looked away as he changed into pajama pants. Then Steve said, "Wanna watch a movie or something for a while?"

Having already finished any of his schoolwork that couldn't be done later in the week, Jonathan couldn't think of a reason not to spend some time relaxing. "Sure," he said, changing into his pajamas too, before sitting down on his bed.

Steve's bed was lofted and the TV/VCR he'd brought from home sat on top of the mini fridge underneath the bed. After sticking a movie into the VCR and hitting play, Steve dropped down onto Jonathan's bed with him. He started out a good six inches away, but as the movie progressed and Jonathan got sleepier and slumped down more, he realized Steve was a lot closer than he'd started. Jonathan leaned his heavy head over onto Steve's shoulder, enjoying the way their arms and knees pressed together.

When Jonathan woke up, the clock on the microwave said it was the middle of the night and he could hear Steve lightly snoring from his bed across the room. Jonathan stretched out in his bed, thinking it felt lonely and that Elris was lucky he got to share a bed with Yvonne and Arlen. Before he could analyze that thought, he fell back asleep.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Shout out to the 30+ Fanfic discord for encouraging me to add the unnecessary sex scene to this chapter!

Nancy sat next to Jonathan on her bed, both of them studying for their separate classes. It was nice, just sharing space like this, but something felt off. Jonathan was almost... jumpy. Not quite comfortable. Hoping it wasn't something *she'd* done, Nancy decided to get to the bottom of it.

She set her books aside and asked, "Is there something you want to get off your chest?"

"D&D is tomorrow," he said, like that cleared anything up. After he looked at Nancy, and saw the question in her expression, he elaborated. "Our characters are going to all wake up in the same bed, and I can't decide how I want Elris to react."

"Well," Nancy said, leaning closer and wrapping Jonathan's right hand in both of hers. "What are the options?"

"I suppose they could pretend that it doesn't change anything," he told her. "But if Arlen cuddles Elris in his sleep, I feel like... like..."

Nancy watched Jonathan struggle to find the right words for a moment before stepping in. "Elris hasn't been close to many people outside the monastery, has he?"

Jonathan shook his head. "That's a lot of intimacy for someone who's not used to it."

"Like when you and I started dating?" Nancy asked, getting a nod from Jonathan. Following that line of logic, Nancy asked, "Do you think Elris will have new feelings for Arlen?"

Jonathan nodded again. Then he took a sharp breath and insisted, "He still has feelings for Yvonne, too."

“Okay.”

“It’s—it’s like you said,” Jonathan continued, squeezing Nancy’s hand. “The game can be whatever we want. No real consequences.”

Nancy wasn’t sure how her next thought was going to go over, but she *had* to get it out there. “Like there would be consequences in real life if you had feelings for your roommate?”

With a nod, he replied, “In real life, Yvonne would be hurt and Arlen might never talk to him again. Arlen might not want to get an apartment together for next year, like they’d been planning.”

“Hey, I’m not hurt,” Nancy assured him. “I mean, it would be pretty hypocritical of me, wouldn’t it?”

Jonathan gave half a shrug. “Yeah, I guess.”

“In fact,” Nancy said, cuddling closer to Jonathan, “this is kind of just like all the other things we have in common, if you think about it.”

“That *is* one way to think about it.” Jonathan wrapped his arms around her. “And I mean, we don’t *have* to do anything about feeling this way, right? It can just be one of those things?”

Nancy thought he was being a little naive to think that he could spend a lot of time around Steve and not be tortured by his feelings. She thought about how Steve played Arlen, and thought maybe there was a chance.... Maybe she was wrong, though. Wrapped up in Jonathan’s arms, Nancy whispered, “What do you think the chances are that Steve likes us back? Both of us?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “And I don’t think we will know until we ask him.”

“Did you...” Nancy thought of all the ways this could go wrong, and what a headache it would be to get past them. “Did you want to wait? Until the end of the semester? It’s only a month, and then you wouldn’t have to share a room with him if... I mean, if things go badly.”

Jonathan frowned as he appeared to think this through. “What if he

starts dating someone? We'll have missed our chance."

"That's a good point. He's gone on a few dates since we've known him. None of them have stuck, but there's always a chance the next one will." Nancy tried to imagine being friends with Steve after he started dating someone who wasn't her and Jonathan. Bright, hot jealousy crept up the back of her throat. "Should we tell him together?"

Shaking his head, Jonathan said, "I don't want him to feel ganged up on. Let me feel him out on the idea first. See if I can get some answers before demanding that he date us, or something."

Nancy giggled. "Date us or else!"

Jonathan laughed too. After a moment, his smile fell away. "If I ask him, and it goes *well*, I assume you'll want to be there before anything *happens*."

"Yeah," Nancy agreed, before thinking it over. "I suppose you could probably kiss him, if you want. Maybe if he needs convincing."

Jonathan smiled. "You think my kisses are convincing?"

"Very," she said, pulling him into a kiss. One kiss turned into another, and Nancy was about to take her shirt off before she remembered Carol was supposed to be back soon. Catching her breath, Nancy said, "Ask him soon. Then we can use your room all the time."

Jonathan laughed. "Okay. I'll ask him. I promise."

Nancy knew she could count on Jonathan's promise. He loved her, and he would never break a promise to someone he loved.

~*~

The session where Arlen woke up in bed with Elris and Yvonne went as well as they could have hoped. Steve was glad that they'd focused on the political intrigue and figuring out the amulet, and just sort of brushed over the relationship stuff. He wasn't sure he could bear it. Not when he now recognized just how much he was in love with not

just Nancy, but Jonathan too.

He'd never really had to confront this about himself before. He remembered it piquing his interest during high school, when he found out there were people who liked both girls and guys. He hadn't thought about it too hard at the time, though. Steve had figured since he liked girls *a lot*, that meant he was straight.

It took a year of being best friends with Robin before he was willing to admit that maybe, just maybe, Steve was one of those people who was attracted to both genders. Or more than one gender. He knew Robin had explained other genders to him at some point, but he hadn't retained much of it past that night. Perhaps it was the tequila he'd smuggled from his parents that had been the issue. He'd remember if she told him again, he just knew it.

After the session, Jonathan walked Nancy to her room and Steve helped Robin get her DM things back to hers. When he got back to his room, Steve was surprised to see Jonathan there already, sitting on his bed.

"Hey," Steve said, closing the door behind him and crossing the room so he could put his D&D folder in the right place on his bookshelf. When he turned around, Jonathan was watching him. "What?"

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" Jonathan asked, scooting over on his bed like he was making room for Steve to sit down too. He looked a little nervous or jumpy, and this was going to be something bad, wasn't it?

Jonathan was going to say that Steve playing the game the way he had been was just too uncomfortable for him. Maybe it was the gay thing, or maybe it was hitting on Nancy's character, but in either case, Steve was sure the campaign was about to implode. Sighing, he sat down beside Jonathan on the bed. "Okay. Lay it on me. What's up?"

Looking down at his hands in his lap, Jonathan said, "I wanted to thank you for getting me into D&D. I've never really had friends before, could never quite get out of my shell until you burst in and dragged me out of it."

Steve gave a relieved laugh and scooted closer to Jonathan, now that he knew this wasn't a bad talk. "Yeah, man. Of course! It's been really great having you be part of the campaign. I mean, when Symon sacrificed himself for Arlen and Yvonne? I've never seen anyone do something that brave before."

"Thanks," Jonathan said with a soft chuckle. "I— It's—" Jonathan frowned for a moment. "The game has given me the opportunity to be the kind of person I wish I could be in real life."

Thinking about how Arlen got to admit he'd been in love with Symon, Steve said, "Yeah. I know what you mean."

After a silent moment, Jonathan reached over and took Steve's left hand, holding it between his gently, like he thought he might be capable of hurting Steve. "The way Arlen is?" Jonathan asked, his voice just as gentle as his hands. "Is that how you wish you could be in real life?"

Steve thought about denying it, about taking his hand away from Jonathan and insisting it was just a game and not to read too much into it. Steve thought about doing that, but when he looked at Jonathan's face and saw the sincerity in his eyes, he couldn't help but nod. The, "Yes," he said was whispered, his voice stuck in his throat.

Despite Steve's expectations, Jonathan didn't pull his hands away. He gave Steve's hand a gentle squeeze and met Steve's eyes as he whispered back, "Me too."

When Steve understood what Jonathan was saying, a wave of vertigo hit him, the floor seeming to tilt under him. He put his free hand down on the bed until he felt stable again. "You too? You like...?" Steve couldn't even say it out loud.

"I like *you* ," Jonathan said, and Steve wasn't sure he'd ever heard something so exhilarating and brave in his entire life. "Nancy and I both do." He looked up and met Steve's eyes again. "Do you like us?"

"Do I...?" Steve felt the floor tilting again. They liked him? Jonathan wanted to know if he liked them back? Was this a dream? Just in case it wasn't, he said, "Yes! Fuck, yes, I do! It's been killing me

having to keep it to myself this whole—”

Jonathan cut him off by getting to his knees and pulling Steve into a kiss. It had been so long since Steve had kissed anyone, he was unprepared for how *hot* Jonathan’s lips felt against his, how much it sent a thrill down his spine and put an ache in his throat. He kissed back as best he could, wrapping his arms around Jonathan to keep him close. Steve had wanted this so much, for so long, that he couldn’t get enough. He wanted to drown in Jonathan’s kisses for as long as possible.

But then a thought intruded on his enjoyment of the kiss. He reluctantly pulled his mouth away from Jonathan’s and breathlessly asked, “Nancy?”

“She said kissing without her was okay,” Jonathan told him, panting and out of breath already. The thought of having rendered Jonathan breathless made Steve’s blood feel like it was about to boil under his skin.

With a groan, Steve slipped his hands under Jonathan’s shirt and up the skin on his back, “What if I want to do so much more than kissing?”

Jonathan took a sharp breath, pulling Steve into a wet, biting kiss. When he backed off again, he said, “I’ll go get her.”

Not willing to stop touching Jonathan now that he was allowed to after so long, Steve kissed him again. “I’ll come with you.”

Jonathan grinned and took Steve’s hand, pulling him to his feet and out the door. There was no one in the hallway, so Steve kept his hand clasped in Jonathan’s as they went to the stairwell at the end. Jonathan dropped his hand when they reached the next flight up, opening the fire door and leading the way to Nancy’s room. There was a girl headed the other way, so Steve tried to be satisfied with putting his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder as they waited for Nancy to answer the door.

Instead of Nancy, Carol opened it, looking at Jonathan, then at Steve, a disgruntled look on her face. “Nancy went to the bathroom.”

“Thanks!” Steve said, heading in the direction of the bathrooms, dragging Jonathan with him.

“We’re not actually going to barge in on her in the bathroom, are we?” Jonathan hissed.

Steve laughed. “No. Of course not. I just don’t want to wait any longer than I have to.”

“I know what you mean,” Jonathan said, standing dangerously close to Steve as they stopped outside the bathroom door, his eyes on Steve’s lips.

Only the sound of a door opening down the hallway kept Steve from kissing the hell out of him. As it was, he leaned close and whispered, “I can’t wait to get my hands all over you. My mouth, too. Want to kiss you everywhere. God, I’ve waited *so long* .”

Jonathan groaned and reached down, readjusting himself quickly. The thought that he’d affected Jonathan that much made Steve have to do a similar adjustment. Before Steve could tell Jonathan more, the bathroom door opened and Nancy came out.

“Hey, guys,” she said, a careful look on her face. She was already wearing pajamas, her hair pulled up into a bun.

More direct and to-the-point than Steve had ever seen him be, Jonathan told Nancy, “He said yes,” and then grabbed her hand. “Come on!”

Nancy laughed and let Jonathan pull her to the central staircase, Steve following in their wake. He wanted to touch Nancy too, but he needed to hear it straight from her mouth that she wanted him in return. He settled for putting his hand on her lower back as they hit the next flight down and hurried through the hallway to his and Jonathan’s room. The room was as they’d left it, dimly lit only by the lamp over Steve’s desk.

As Steve closed and locked the door behind them, Nancy asked him, “You said yes? You want to be with us?”

“I want to be with you,” Steve agreed, closing the distance between

them and kissing her hungrily. When she kissed him back just as fiercely, he felt justified in scooping her up and making her giggle as he hugged her tightly. "I'm in love with you," he told her before reaching for Jonathan. "Both of you."

He kissed Jonathan again, Nancy still in his arms, her mouth on his neck. It was overwhelming in the best possible way, making Steve dizzy with all the possibilities of what might be to come. Jonathan pulled on the hem of Steve's shirt. "Can we?"

"Yes, yes!" Steve said, setting Nancy down and helping Jonathan get his shirt over his head. Jonathan's shirt was next and by the time Steve turned to Nancy to help with hers, she was already topless, dropping her shirt to the floor. "Oh, Jesus," Steve muttered, his knees going weak at the sight.

Nancy pushed Steve until he was sitting on Jonathan's bed, tilting his head up so he could kiss her again. He held her close with his right hand, loving the feel of her soft skin under his fingertips. With his left hand, Steve pulled Jonathan closer, dipping his fingers under the waistband of Jonathan's jeans. Nancy's pajama pants were the next to go, and then she was helping Steve get Jonathan out of his pants.

Thirty seconds later, they were all down to their underwear and breathing heavily as they looked at one another. "What do you guys want?" Steve asked, pulling Jonathan closer and kissing where his hip bone jutted out. The groan he got made Steve wonder what other sounds he could coax out of his roommate. He trailed open-mouthed kisses along Jonathan's waistband until he got to the center. Curling his fingers around the elastic, Steve looked up and asked, "This okay?"

"Yeah, yes," Jonathan nodded, his eyes dark in the dim light.

Nancy straddled Steve's left leg, the crotch of her panties hot and damp against his thigh. Steve asked her, "This okay with you, too?"

"Yeah," she whispered, looking up at Jonathan as she reached for the waistband of his boxers. Steve took the other side, pulling the underwear out and around his hard-on, leaving him standing naked in front of them. Then Nancy pulled Jonathan a step closer and

wrapped her hand around his cock. She leaned closer and licked the head before taking the tip into her mouth. Steve groaned at the sight, but Jonathan groaned louder, putting his hand on Steve's shoulder like he needed help to stay standing. Nancy pulled back, her hand still around Jonathan as she whispered in Steve's ear, "Now you try."

He could have sworn his heart skipped a beat. Steve put his hand over Nancy's and ducked in, looking up at Jonathan's face just as he closed his lips around his cock. Jonathan's eyes fluttered closed and he moaned as Steve sucked him in and then drew him out again. It felt weird and very different from anything he'd ever done before, but it was also good and so sexy Steve felt like he might come just from dry-humping Nancy's leg.

Steve's focus narrowed to the taste of Jonathan on his tongue and the feel of his lips sliding down Jonathan's shaft. Nancy dropped her hand and whimpered when she ground down against Steve's thigh. He put his free hand down the back of her panties, cupping her butt cheek and squeezing it gently. She moaned again before murmuring in his ear, "Want you inside me."

A groan escaped Steve's throat, making drool slide down his chin. He pulled his mouth off Jonathan and kissed Nancy. "I want that too," he told her, stroking Jonathan's cock and looking up at him. "That okay with you?"

Biting his lower lip, Jonathan nodded. He wrapped his fingers around Steve's wrist and pulled his hand away before leaning forward and kissing Steve again. Steve wondered if Jonathan could taste himself on Steve's tongue. After giving Steve another quick kiss, he said, "Be right back."

Steve tried to catch him and pull him back, but he was too quick, and also he had a lap full of Nancy, who kissed him and started pushing off his boxers. "Oh, god," Steve murmured, helping Nancy out of her panties and slipping his fingers between her legs.

She groaned and mashed her lips against his again as his fingers stroked her gushing-wet slit. Nancy pushed him down onto the bed, her hands in his hair, her mouth desperate against his. Jonathan murmured in his ear, "Can I put this on you?"

Breaking away from Nancy, Steve looked over at Jonathan, who was holding up a condom. "Yeah, please," Steve said, but he couldn't stop himself from reaching out and pulling Jonathan into a couple kisses before letting him go.

Nancy made little noises as he touched her and Jonathan's fist closed around his cock and Steve felt overwhelmed, but also like he'd give anything for this to keep going on for as long as he could stand it. It got even worse once the condom was on and Nancy sank down onto him. Jonathan squeezed into the bed next to them, sucking on Steve's neck and wrapping Steve's hand around his cock. Nancy rose up, then dropped down, shuddering and crying out. Steve was pretty sure he cried out, too.

Being there with Nancy and Jonathan, all their skin pressed close to his, their mouths taking turns kissing him, Steve felt more real than he had at maybe any other time in his life. He felt like things finally made sense, like this was everything he'd ever wanted in his life, and he was finally getting it.

Jonathan gasped, his forehead pressed tight against Steve's shoulder, his cock pulsing in Steve's hand, his come warm and wet against Steve's side and soaking into the sheets underneath him. Steve let go of Jonathan and put both his hands on Nancy's hips, trying to draw it out, trying not to come too soon.

A moment later, Jonathan sat up and reached between Steve and Nancy's bodies, making Nancy bite her lip and move her hips in little rocking motions. Steve held her in place and drove up into her in nice, long strokes until she was digging her fingernails into Steve's shoulder and muffling her scream against Jonathan's neck. Steve let himself go, holding Nancy close with one arm, keeping Jonathan near them with the other.

As his breaths slowed down and his heartbeat returned to its normal pace, Steve held both of his partners as close as he could. He got drowsy and thought about crawling up into his own bed, but it seemed like too much effort. Someone cleaned him up a bit and turned off the desk light, and then Steve was pressed up against the wall with Nancy curled up on top of him and Jonathan sleeping on his left shoulder, one blanket over all three of them.

The last thought he had before he fell asleep was that he envied Arlen for being able to sleep in a big bed in the King's castle, instead of a narrow college dorm room twin bed. Maybe he'd be able to buy a big bed with Jonathan when they moved in together the following year.

~*~

Jonathan sat in his usual place at the table in the basement rec room, Nancy to his left, Robin to his right, and Steve across from him. Steve grinned at him and said, "Arlen takes the amulet and says to Yvonne and Elris, 'I love you. I've always loved you.' Then he downs his Potion of Haste and runs away from the dragon and toward the altar in the back of the temple. He gets there just before his turn ends and puts the amulet into the socket on the altar."

Grinning, Robin told him, "The dragon rears up and says, 'No! I will not allow this!' It takes a deep breath and breathes fire in Arlen's direction. Make a dexterity saving throw."

Steve rolled his die and told her, "Nine."

"You take..." She rolled a handful of dice and added them up. "Forty-eight points of damage."

"I'm unconscious," Steve said, though he was still grinning. Not that Jonathan could blame him. It had been a long school year, and now that finals were over for all of them, it felt like they could really enjoy this session, no matter what happened.

"It's Yvonne's turn," said Robin.

A wide smile on her face, Nancy shifted in her chair and looked directly at Robin. "I say, 'Not my consort, you Asshole!' and then I run up and stab it with my elemental weapon." She rolled her die. "With Elris' blessing, that's nineteen to hit!"

"You hit!" Robin told her. "How much damage do you do?"

"Twenty-one damage!"

"You open a gaping wound in its side, the cold magic on your sword

causing frostbite around the edges. The dragon roars, viciously wounded, but still alive.”

“I run around the dragon,” Nancy said, “keeping my eye on it, but getting as close to Arlen as I can without letting it attack me.”

Robin nodded and moved Nancy’s game piece on the map. Then she looked up at Jonathan. “Elris? What do you do?”

“Seeing the man I love unconscious and smoldering, rage rises up in me and I run at the dragon. I touch one of its giant feet and cast Inflict Wounds at third level.”

“Oh, shit!” Robin said with a grin. “Roll for the attack.”

This was a big move. If it didn’t hit, he’d be out his last high-level spell slot and practically defenseless. If it did hit, he might do major damage. This whole battle might come down to this one roll. He threw his dice and held his breath as they stopped rolling. “Eighteen.”

“That hits!” Robin cried. Steve and Nancy both cheered, Nancy jumping over into his space and wrapping her arms around him.

Grinning, Jonathan rolled a few more dice for damage. It took him a moment to add them all up, and when he did, he grinned at Robin, “Forty-seven points of damage.”

Robin laughed. “When you touch the dragon, you push necrotic energy into it, causing the life that animated it to flee. Wounds appear all over the dragon’s body, slowly seeping blood as the dragon slumps down, takes one last breath, and then dies!”

Jonathan cheered along with the others, jumping out of his seat, letting first Nancy, then Steve hug him. A few other students left the lounge giving them dirty looks, but Jonathan didn’t care. This was his last night on campus until class started again in fall, and he was damn sure going to make the most of it. Still laughing as they sat down, Jonathan said, “I’m going to use the rest of my turn to run over to Arlen and hold him in my arms.”

Robin nodded before looking over at Steve. “Make a death saving

throw, just for me, would you?”

Steve nodded and rolled his dice. “Twelve! I’m still safe.”

“Good,” Robin said with an exaggerated sigh. “The dragon’s dead, so now it’s Yvonne’s turn!”

Smiling widely, Nancy said, “I run over to Arlen and use Lay on Hands, giving him back twenty hit points and saving him from death. As he wakes up, I put my hand on his face and say, ‘You’re not getting away from us that easily.’”

Steve grinned and put his hand over Nancy’s. “I say, ‘I knew you’d save me,’ and I pull her into a kiss.”

Jonathan gave a soft whistle, which made the others laugh.

“Okay, okay,” Robin said, gesturing to them to settle down. “We’ll gloss over the rest of the kissing. You notice there’s a door to the right of the altar that opened when you put the amulet in the socket. This is it. This is what you’ve been waiting for. Yvonne, it’s time for you to fulfill your divine duty and save the world. Are you ready?”

Nancy grabbed Steve’s hand and put her other in Jonathan’s. “You bet your ass I’m ready!”

Overcome with affection, Jonathan lifted Nancy’s hand to his lips and kissed the back of it before sharing a smile across the table with Steve. This game of theirs just might be the best thing that had ever happened to him. He couldn’t be more grateful if he tried.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading! I’d love to hear what you thought of this one! You can find out more about me and my writing [on tumblr](#).

Reminder: On **May 1st**, I will be taking down my [Mr. Sandman series](#). If you’d like to save a copy, you can use AO3’s download feature, or you can email me (ptera.hitw@gmail.com) to ask for a pdf.